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AUTHOR	McLean, Edward L.; Colclough, Glenna S.
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ABSTRACT

Social power is defined as the ability to affect group decisions; power actors are those individuals who seek and exercise power and affect group decisions. Power structure research was conducted in Kershaw County, South Carolina in 1971 and 1977. Although methodologies differed, both surveys identified and interviewed power actors for the county, listing 49 power actors in 1971 and 45 in 1977. During the six year period new power actors emerged; the lists shared only 15 common names. Physicians, dentists, clergy, school administrators and industrial executives were on the 1971 list but not the 1977 one. The merchant/realtor/developer category was most numerous in 1977. Influence of the Junior Chamber of Commerce, service clubs, fraternal orders, and religious groups nearly vanished by 1977. Influence from and participation in quasi-governmental commissions, councils, and public service agencies increased. Although this pattern facilitated participation from more individuals and enhanced a trend toward pluralism, two dangers are seen. Funds for some public programs may decline, creating needs for abrupt adjustment in institutional functions. More importantly, many programs depend on federal-state-regional support, and power structure and decision making also are dependent on these federal, state, and multi-county council funds. Thus, more of the decisions for Kershaw County are being expedited outside the county. (DS)

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POWER AND DECISON MAKING IN A RURAL COUNTY: A LONGITUDINAL ANALYSIS

by

Edward L. McLean
and
Glenna S. Colclough

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Department of Agricultural Economics
and Rural Sociology
Agricultural Experiment Station
Clemson University
Clemson, S.C. 29631

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Edward L. McLean is Professor and Glenna S. Colclough is a Research Associate, Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology, Clemson University. Research leading to this paper is, in part, from Southern Regional Project S-120, Social Organization For Development of Low-Income Rural Counties.

INTRODUCTION

Power structure research, initially, concentrated on methods and terminology to label power actors from communities and counties. The reputational method identified those individuals known to be influential, by virtue of their positions in the local community structure. By this method, organizational officers and agency administrators typically, were identified as potential decision-makers. Methods were employed, as well, to determine individuals involved in decisions, regardless of status-role considerations. A so-called issue-area approach evolved, which identified individuals influential on a particular issue or institutional function. Individuals could potentially be influential on several or many such efforts.

The literature emphasizes certain similarities regarding the nature of power structure among varying units of analysis; i.e., rural and urban areas, counties, municipalities, and other community settings. The power structure in some communities and counties is monolithic in that the same power actors are influential on most issues. In others the power structure is pluralistic in that decision makers on one issue or function (e.g., property taxes) are different from those in other functions (e.g., land use). The ideal of democracy is, of course, one of pluralism in which each individual and family has access to many (plural) organizations, associations, public agencies, and government officials. Input to and feedback from these power bases aids implementation of pluralism. Within a given populace, pluralism is dependent upon minimum levels of education, interaction, communication, physical mobility, and organizational activity. Pluralism is less likely to be prevalent where segments of the populace are isolated, including cultural, social, psychological, and geographic isolation. Kammeyer (1963) suggested that few individuals participate in decision making, on selected issues, in socially homogeneous communities. Bonjean (1971, 1974), Grimes (1976), Lauman (1977) and others have concluded that our systems of communication, information, and organizational activity, facilitate non-elitist decision making. At the same time, decision making at all levels requires specialized knowledge and bureaucratic structures that may create apathy rather than facilitate pluralism.

Social power is defined as the ability to affect group decisions. Power actors of a county are most likely to be associated with economic wealth; i.e., financial worth, property ownership, and business enterprises. This is not to say that wealth automatically entitles one to a position of influence. Such individuals must also seek and exercise power and actively participate in group decisions. Furthermore, power actors may work behind the scenes, and may not actually appear on lists of reputational leaders, officers, agency administrators, or government officials. The research task, then, is to locate those individuals (e.g., in a county) who affect group decisions. In so doing, the nature of the community power structure, be it more monolithic or pluralistic, may be explained and changes in that structure over time may be assessed.

THE COUNTY

Research results shall be reported from power structure research conducted in Kershaw County, South Carolina, in 1971 and 1977. This county is in the midlands region of South Carolina, had a 1977

population of approximately 35,000 inhabitants, and with the urban population (9,000 inhabitants) located in the county seat of Camden. In 1970, 32 percent of the population in the county was nonwhite; median educational attainment for the county was 10.6 years, median family income was $8,258, and there were 1,615 families (18.8 percent of the total) with incomes below the poverty level. The economic base of the county, in order of economic magnitude, includes manufacturing, agriculture, and forest products.

The county seat is located on the site of one of the first inland settlements in South Carolina, a pre-revolutionary British Fort, and the Cornwallis castle. Camden is an equestrian center, the home of the Carolina Cup and Colonial Cup steeplechase events, and several prestige stables are located in the area. The city is also known as the location of winter homes for wealthy northern industrialists. Local sources estimate approximately 50 homes in the city to have an appraised value in excess of $500,000. Some families (e.g., Firestone) maintain more that one home in Camden.

Camden and Kershaw County have been known to be at the forefront in implementing selected local government policy measures. Camden adopted a zoning ordinance in 1948 and the Kershaw County council adopted a county-wide zoning ordinance in 1969. Kershaw County was the first county in South Carolina to initiate and implement a home rule form of county government, in contrast to the prevailing county delegation system.[1/]

THE 1971 RESEARCH

In 1971, Wilton J. Joyner, a Ph.D. student from the University of South Carolina, conducted power structure research in Kershaw County. Joyner's methodology included gathering data from:

(a) a preliminary pool of twelve individuals was contacted; these informants occupied positions in the local mass-media and financial institutions of the county.

(b) a pool of 77 additional informants was contacted, named by the preliminary panel and occupying positions such as

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[1/] County delegation form of county government refers to a system whereby the individuals elected to the South Carolina legislature from a given county also perform the majority of the executive functions of county government. In 1968, the state legislature authorized Kershaw County to adopt a county council form of government, or home rule.

In that year Kershaw became the first county in the state to elect representatives to the state legislature and county council representatives. It was suggested that home rule would facilitate citizen access to elected county representatives; i.e., pluralism.

representatives to the state legislature, mayors, city managers, chairpersons of political parties, association officers, and agency heads.

(c) Additional influentials, knowledgeables, and leaders were named and contacted utilizing supervenient procedures. The resultant name generating panel included 59 individuals.

This panel identified a total of 267 individuals as community leaders, and those named by twelve or more of the panel members were included on the final list of power actors for the county. This list comprised the names of 49 individuals. Joyner then interviewed these 49 power actors to determine social characteristics, formal and informal status-roles, and history of participation and decision making in associations, institutions, movements, public issues, and social action processes.

THE 1977 RESEARCH

The 1977 research, conducted by rural sociologists at Clemson University, is part of southern regional project S-120, Social Organization for the Development of Low-Income Rural Counties in the South. Kershaw is one three South Carolina study counties, and was selected on the basis of regional project guidelines, not merely because similar research had been conducted in the county in 1971. Personnel from the county staff of the Cooperative Extension Service facilitated the conduct of the 1977 research.

A list of positional leaders of the county was prepared. This list was similar to the name generating panel from the 1971 research, but placed more emphasis on public agency administrators, elected and appointed government officials, and less emphasis on officers of political parties, service clubs, and fraternal orders.

These individuals were contacted and asked to name influentials, knowledgeables, and leaders in four areas of concern: economic development, health facilities and services, land use, and change in land use from open space and crop farming to forestry. Upon completion of this procedure, names which were mentioned more than twice by these respondents, were placed on a respondent list for the county. This list provided the names of those to be interviewed using the regional project questionnaire. In addition to the original names on the list, persons who were mentioned and ranked by the venial respondents, were also included in the sample to be interviewed. The final list comprised the names of 45 individuals, all subsequently interviewed by the authors of this paper.

FINDINGS

The most surprising finding from the 1977 research concerned the new power actors that, through decision making roles, had emerged during the six years. There were only 15 common names on both the

1971 and 1977 lists (N = 49 in 1971; N = 45 in 1977). Reasons for the attrition of previous and emergence of new power actors will be discussed in the following section of this paper.

Selected characteristics of the power actors were tabulated in both the 1971 and 1977 studies, and will be discussed briefly. In 1971 there were two black and one female power actor(s) in Kershaw County: these categories (black and female) comprised two and seven individuals, respectively, in 1977. There was little variation in residence patterns for the two years; about 20 percent of the power actors had migrated into the county during the past 20 years. In 1977, however, two power actors lived outside the county, whereby all were county residents in 1971. Occupations of the power actors are presented in Table 1. Respondents represented a wide range of occupations at both time periods. Physicians, dentists, clergy, school administrators, and industrial executives were included on the 1971 list but not in 1977. The merchant/realtor/developer category was most numerous in 1977. Hospital, health and social services administration were represented, as well, due to the focus on health issues in the 1977 methodology. The educational attainment of power actors was actually lower in 1977. This results from fewer attorneys, physicians and dentists in the 1977 group.

Varying methodologies were utilized to select the relevant issues in the two studies. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy to compare the issues that power actors identified, and these data are presented in Table 2. This list is cumulative; i.e., power actors could name more than one issue. In 1971, the county was experiencing a process of desegregation and consolidation of public elementary and secondary schools. Race relations was an issue affecting the schools, other public facilities, and employment. Neither of these issues emerged in 1977. Kershaw County was one of the first in South Carolina to implement property tax equilization. Reorganization of county government refers to the fact that a county delegation system was replaced by a home rule form of government. These two issues were also resolved, or at least latent, by 1977.

The economic base of Kershaw County was essentially agricultural at the end of World War II. Industrial employing firms located in the county, particularly in the 1950's and land use changed from open space and agriculture in the late 1960's and 1970's. It is suggested that the social organizational base for economic development has persisted and that power actors, even the new recruits, perceive this issue. The land use issue is complex and varied; farmers, timber land owners, forest products processors, realtors, and developers, define the situation somewhat differently. Little conflict exists, however, partially because of property tax equilization and because large tracts of land are still in open space. There is consensus that health, as a public service, should be improved in the county.

A method has been devised to measure, for a given unit of analysis, the magnitude of a monolithic or pluralistic a power structure. This method may be used for studies of different units of analyses or for the same units (e.g. counties) over time. The procedure consists of tabulating the cumulative frequency of issues listed by power actors, dividing by the total number of power actors, and then dividing that quotient by the number of issues. The lower the resulting score, the greater the degree of pluralism. Data for this procedure are provided in Table 2. The score for Kershaw County in 1971 is .56 and the score in 1977 is .44. Joyner concluded that the Kershaw power structure was more pluralistic than monolithic in 1971. Although findings are guarded because of varying methodologies for the two studies, it is suggested that the Kershaw power structure was even less monolithic in 1977.

Power actors, in both studies, were asked to name all the associations, organizations, agencies, and groups in the county that were influential on the relevant issues. These data are presented in Table 3. This list is cumulative; i.e., power actors could name all the groups believed to be influential; and frequencies of greater 4 are listed. Education was an issue in 1971 and health an issue in 1977; thus, certain agencies are associated with those issues for the respective years. Aside from those categories, however, the two lists are quite different. The Junior Chamber of Commerce, service clubs, religious groups, fraternal organizations, and political parties are not even on the 1977 list. The 1977 list includes quasi-governmental commissions, councils and districts; informal and industry groups; and USDA agencies.

It is not suggested that change in power actors caused change in influential groups or vice versa. It is known that the many federal-state-district-local programs account for public service agencies and councils being on the influential group list. It is suggested that one-third to one-half of the 1977 power actors are decision makers in the resulting commissions, councils, districts, agencies, and informal groups.

DISCUSSION

It was determined in the 1977 research of the power structure in Kershaw County that former power actors had retired or withdrawn from active participation during the past few years. Some of these individuals had migrated to Kershaw County in the late 1940's or early 1950's and many were World War II veterans. In any event, it became apparant, even before comparisons with the 1971 research that a different power structure had evolved during the early and mid-1970's.

During the early 1970's, a number of federal-state-local programs were initiated and implemented in Kershaw County. Multi-county councils of governments were organized in the late 1960's in South

Carolina and Kershaw is one of four counties in a council that had been active in soliciting funds and initiating programs. Programs that utilize the above categories of funds require input from the recipient publics. Such participation could have an impact on the power structure, particularly over a period of six years.

The previously discussed matter of form of county government is also relevant. Home rule may be expected to produce a more pluralistic power structure. Even if this does not occur, power actors could emerge as county council representatives are elected. Social interaction potentials provided by this process and from subsequent power actors themselves would enhance participation in public issues.

To reiterate, there are methodological variations between the 1971 and 1977 studies. Nevertheless, it is concluded that the number of power actors did not decline, 1971-1977. There was, however, dramatic loss and replacement of power actors during the six year period; there were only 15 individuals identified in both the 1971 and 1977 studies. It is suggested that age of the original power actors, introduction of programs with non-local support, and aftermath of change in form of county government, contributed to these changes. Several of the issues identified in 1971 were sensitive and difficult; e.g.; school integration, school consolidation, and race relations. Although these issues were resolved with a minimum of inter-county conflict, perhaps this process weeded out many of the original power actors. A final explanation for the large number of new power actors during the six years is simply that younger individuals sought and obtained decision making roles in the county.

Regarding occupations of the power actors, physicians, dentists, school administrators, clergy, and industrial executives were absent from the list in 1977. There were more power actors from the merchant/realtor/developer categories in 1977 and public service administrators were on the 1977 list. In 1977, the respondents indicated that service clubs, fraternal orders, and religious groups had little influence on public issues, but that quasi-governmental commissions, councils, and districts and public agencies had substantial influence in the county. This trend reflects a growing dependence on non-local government funds and programs; the power structure and general public must share the responsibility for this dependence.

There was no evidence that wealthy residents were prominent in decision making in the county in either 1971 or 1977. Organizations in which the wealthy participated were not categorized as influential in 1977. There were more female power actors in 1977 and an equal number of blacks. The power actors tended to perceive few problems in the county in 1977.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The power structure in Kershaw County was interpreted as pluralistic from research conducted in 1971. By 1977, at least 30 new power actors were influential decision makers, numerous public programs had been

initiated and implemented, and a new form of county government had been in effect for nine years. Several issues identified in 1971 were sensitive and the resulting processes may account for some of the attrition of power actors. It is concluded that all of these factors, along with concomitant processes of social change in the county, has contributed to an even more pluralistic power structure in 1977.

Conclusions regarding groups in the county that, according to the power actors, are most influential, must be guarded. Influence of the Junior Chamber of Commerce, service clubs, fraternal orders, and religious groups, nearly vanished by 1977. Influence from and participation in quasi-governmental commissions, councils, and districts and from public service agencies, increased. This pattern facilitates participation from greater numbers of individuals and probably enhances a trend toward pluralism. There are at least two dangers associated with such social structural patterns, however. Funds for some of the public programs may decline which would create needs for abrupt adjustments in some institutional functions. More importantly, many of these programs depend on federal-state-regional support, and to a lesser extent, local support. Consequently, the power structure and decision making are dependent upon these federal, state, and multi-county council funds. Two individuals, employed by two different councils, and not residents of the county, were identified as power actors for the county. More of the decisions for Kershaw County are being expedited outside the county.

Table 1
Occupations of Power Actors
Kershaw County, 1971 and 1977

1971		1977	
Occupation	Frequency	Occupation	Frequency
Attorney	8	Merchant/Realtor/Developer	10
Farmer	6	Farmer	6
Merchant/Realtor/Developer	5	Attorney	5
Physician/Dentist	4	Banker	3
School Administration	3	Hospital/Health Administration	3
Clergy	3	Social Services	3
Industrial Executive	3	Other	15
Other	17		45
	49		

Table 2
Power Actor Participation by Issue
Kershaw County, 1971 and 1977

1971		1977	
Issue	Frequency	Issue	Frequency
Public School Desegregation and Consolidation	42	Economic Development	24
Race Relations	36	Land Use and Change in Land Use	22
Reassessment of Property Taxes	24	Health Services and Facilities	13
Library Merger	18		59
Reorganization of County Government	18		
	138		

Table 3
Influential Groups Named by Power Actors
Kershaw County, 1971 and 1977

1971		1977	
Group	Frequency	Group	Frequency
Chamber of Commerce	65	County Council	37
County Council	42	Chamber of Commerce	32
Lions Club	35	Planning & Zoning Commission	31
Jr. Chamber of Commerce	31	County Health Dept.	26
County Board of Education	23	County Memorial Hospital	20
Rotary Club	21	Soil Conservation Service	18
Local Churches	20	Forestry Commission	16
Camden City Council	18	Multi-Council of Governments	14
Camden Human Relations Council	16	Camden City Council	12
Kiwanis Club	13	Multi-County Health District	12
Camden Historical Foundation	12	Landowners and Realtors	12
Sertoma Club	10	Forest Product Companies	11
American Legion	9	S.C. Forestry Assoc.	10
County Farm Bureau	7	S. C. Dept. of Social Services	10
County Ministerial Assoc.	5	County Farm Bureau	9
County Legislative Delegation	5	Informal Community Groups	8
Optimist Club	5	Cooperative Extension Service	8
Planning and Zoning Commission	5	Farmer's Home Administration	8

Table 3 (Continued)
Influential Groups Named by Power Actors
Kershaw County, 1971 and 1977

1971		1977	
Group	Frequency	Group	Frequency
Pilot Club	5	Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service	7
Masons	5	Composite USDA Agencies	7
County Democratic Party	5	S.C. Dept. of Health	7
County Republican Party	5	Multi-County Community Action	6
		Private Industries (in addition to Forest Products)	6

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